

7 Myths about Teens, Alcohol and Other Drugs

- /. "My kids are good kids. They won't get into alcohol or other drugs."
- 2. "They'll grow out of it and be ok."
- 3. "We live in the suburbs. Drugs are a city problem."
- 4. "I'm teaching them to drink responsibly."
- 5. "I can't stop my kids from doing the same things I did at their age."
- 6. "Weed isn't that harmful."
- 7. "If I set limits, my kids won't be popular."

7 Facts about Teens, Alcohol and Other Drugs

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Teens who drink are far more likely to engage 5. in other risky behaviors. Marijuana use has been linked to 6.

teenage brain.

- mental illness.
- 7. Kids whose parents are involved in their lives

Heroin Addiction: Can It Happen to Your Kid?

are less likely to use alcohol and other drugs.

7 Ways to Protect Your Teen from Alcohol and Other Drugs

Myth 1. "My kids are good kids. They won't get into alcohol or other drugs."



Good kids can make *really* bad decisions because their brains are not yet fully developed.

A recent wave of new scientific studies shows that the brain is far from developed until at least age 20, possibly even older. During this time, the area in the front of the brain continues to develop. This is the part of the brain used in decision-making.

"It used to be thought that the brain was formed by about age 12, but we now know the teenage brain is far from fully developed. The areas of the teen brain that are still developing are those that control impulses, planning, and anticipating consequences. So there is a biological reason teenagers often act impulsively and can fail to think through the consequences of their decisions."

- Dr. John Knight, Children's Hospital Boston



Developing Functions in the Teen Brain

- Planning
- + Judgment
- Organization
- Impulse control
- + Thinking through consequences
- + Reading other people's feelings



Be patient with your teen. Remember that critical areas of the brain are still forming.

"Many parents tend to think that drinking is an inevitable part of the teen years and this thinking is something we need to change. Once parents see what alcohol does to a teen brain, I think they will understand the dangers of seeing it as a normal part of growing up."

- Dr. John Knight, Children's Hospital Boston

TO LEARN MORE:



- **Time Magazine**, "Secrets of the Teen Brain," May 10th, 2004. At your library or **www.time.com** (fee may be required).
- The Frontline video **Inside the Teenage Brain** is available at **shoppbs.org** (fee is required).
- www.state.ma.us/dph/bsas
 scroll to: Publications, scroll down to "View and Print Family Guide Info Sheets"





The younger kids start drinking, the more likely they are to become addicted

Studies show that a person who starts drinking before age 15 is four times more likely to develop alcoholism than someone who delays drinking until age 21. That means that the longer you can postpone the age of first use, the safer your child is likely to be. Unfortunately, for some kids, binge drinking begins in middle school.

"Kids are binge drinking in 7th grade; smoking weed in 7th grade."

- Substance Abuse Counselor

"At dances, about half the kids would leave and go back to a big, wooded area behind the school, and then come back into the dance stumbling and falling down."

– High school junior describing 7th grade dances at a suburban school



Tell your kids that drinking when they're young can make them more likely to be dependent on alcohol later.



Experimenting with drugs can have devastating effects.

"Many of the drugs teens experiment with are the most dangerous ones. Inhalants, for example, are among the most dangerous substances. When kids use inhalants, they can just drop to the ground or fall down stairs and break their necks or suffer a skull fracture. Inhalants are found in common household products, like cleaners and spray cans, that are available in every home. Most parents just don't understand that."

- Dr. John Knight, Children's Hospital Boston

3 eighth-graders suspended after drinking episode

Inhalants-A Deadly Experiment

- Tell kids that inhalants can cause permanent brain damage or death, even on the first use.
- Supervise the use of household, shop and art products.
- Teach kids to read labels and treat inhalants as poisons.

TO LEARN MORE:



- For more info. about inhalants and substitutes, call 617-624-5140 or visit
 http://www.mass.gov/dph/inhalant/index.htm.
- Keeping Youth Drug Free, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. DHHS Publication No. (SMA)-3772. Comprehensive, practical advice about how to talk to your kids.

"We live in the suburbs. Drugs are a city problem."



In Massachusetts, urban and suburban youth use drugs in about the same numbers.

"'Drugs aren't a problem in the suburbs.' That's one of the biggest myths I hear. I think that drug use in the suburbs is possibly even greater than in the inner city. A lot of kids in the city see the devastating effects of drugs and decide, 'That's not going to happen to me.' In the suburbs, kids have access to the three ingredients needed for drug use-money, cell phones, and transportation. The first thing we do in treatment is remove access to those three things so that the teenager doesn't have the money to buy, the phone to arrange a purchase, or a car to go get it."

- Dr. John Knight, Children's Hospital Boston

"I see kids getting in the habit of putting stuff up their nose—Ritalin, cocaine, Adderall, Percocet, Vicodin, Klonopin..."

Substance Abuse Counselor at a suburban school



If your child takes Ritalin, Adderall, or another drug that could be abused, monitor its use. Don't let kids take prescription bottles to school. You or the school nurse should administer any medications that could be abused.



The three ingredients needed for drug use are money, cell phones and cars.

"It's not hard to get weed at school. I could get you some right now."

- Recent graduate of a suburban high school

2003 - "Youth Risk Behavior Survey" of the freshman class at a Massachusetts suburban high school

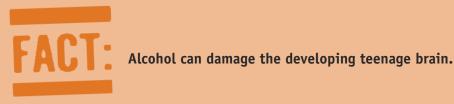
+ Used alcohol in the last month	32%
+ Participated in binge drinking over the past month	14%
+ Used marijuana in the last month	18%
+ Had drugs offered or sold to them at school	38%

"My stepson is really having a problem with pot. It's changed who he is. He's a completely different kid now."

- Stepmother of a suburban junior



Myth 4. "I'm teaching them to drink responsibly."



Youth who drink alcohol at home may not understand how dangerous it can be. Dr. Susan Tapert and colleagues at the University of California San Diego used MRIs to compare the brains of 15- and 16-year-olds who drank heavily with teens who had no history of alcohol abuse.

"The biggest difference we found between the alcohol-dependent and the non-abusing teens had to do with memory functions. Mostly, the alcoholdependent youth did a poorer job at recalling new information... If students are drinking so heavily that it's affecting their brain functioning, they may not be able to get as much out of educational opportunities. This could significantly disrupt their future choices, chances of going to college, and ability to get a good job."

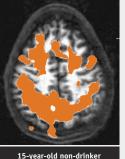
- Dr. Susan Tapert, University of California, San Diego

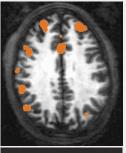


Show your teen this picture.

Explain that the colored areas represent brain activity and that the MRIs were taken when the teens were sober.

Brain Activity Comparison





15-year-old heavy drinker



Serving alcohol to teenagers is dangerous and illegal.



Don't serve alcohol to minors under 21-years old.

"Somewhere between sophomore and junior year, when a parent finds out that a kid has been drinking they think, 'Well, it's too late to stop them. I'll teach them how to drink responsibly. They can drink at our house where it's safe.' That's ridiculous."

- Substance Abuse Counselor

"I have a file in my office full of newspaper clippings about kids who die—from car accidents, drownings, or just falling down the stairs—after drinking in homes where parents supplied alcohol or 'looked the other way' while they drank. It's often after graduation or prom. Some of these parents mistakenly thought their kids deserved to celebrate by drinking. I think the kids deserved to live. Parents need to help teens find ways to celebrate that don't include drinking. Serving alcohol to teens is against the law and parents are often prosecuted. Adolescent social drinking is an oxymoron. The job of adolescence is to experiment, to try new things. With drinking, the experiment is, 'What does it feel like to get drunk?'"

- Dr. John Knight, Children's Hospital Boston

TO LEARN MORE:



 Choose to Keep Your Freedom and Don't Give Kids Alcohol, brochures for youth and parents about the legal implications of serving alcohol to minors, developed by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and collaborators. Available through the Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse, at 1-800-952-6637.



Myth 5. "I can't stop my kids from doing the same things I did at their age."



Yes you can. Here's why you should.

Teenagers who drink are far more likely to drive drunk, have sex, fight and experiment with other drugs.

When you were a kid, risks were associated with drinking. Maybe a classmate, friend or relative was injured or killed in a drunk-driving accident. Now we know even more about the risks. In Massachusetts in 2003, 28 percent of teens said that in the past month they had ridden in a car with a driver who had been drinking. Many teens don't realize that you cannot sober up after a night of drinking.

"Kids stand around and say, 'Who's the least drunk?' And it's every single weekend. The designated driver drinks until 10, then 'sobers up' until 11:30 and drives home. My biggest concern is the sense of invincibility and driving."

– High school junior

"At every party you go to in high school when girls drink, there's less respect. The quys are drunk, and so are the girls."

- Recent graduate of a suburban public high school

Teens today face risks like AIDS and exposure to a wide range of prescription drugs that may not have been present when you were their age. When combined with alcohol, these drugs can have deadly consequences.

- For a teen, drinking three beers is the equivalent of an adult of the same weight drinking a six-pack!
- Teens who drink and cause harm are still held responsible. Drinking is not an excuse and does not change the consequences of a bad decision.

Teens who drink have higher rates of:

- fighting
- riding with a drunk driver
- + carrying a weapon
- attempting suicide
- engaging in risky sexual behavior
- + using other illegal drugs
- being victims of sexual assault (females)



If asked about your past, tell the truth. Don't go into detail. You can say:

"When I was younger, we didn't know what we do now about the harmful effects of marijuana or alcohol. I stopped because I realized how harmful it was and because it was illegal. What I am worried about now is you and your safety."



Myth 6. "Weed isn't that harmful."



Marijuana use causes memory problems, decreases motivation and increases the risk of developing a serious mental illness.

"Marijuana absolutely affects motivation. A lot of the kids who aren't graduating this year are the ones who are hooked on pot. Marijuana becomes the focus of what a kid does and who he is."

- High School Substance Abuse Counselor

Parents who used marijuana may find it hard to set ground rules for their children about marijuana, but a lot has changed over the last 10 to 20 years. Marijuana today is far more potent than it was even ten years ago, and new studies from around the world show marijuana use can lead to serious mental, emotional and social problems.

"The scientific evidence is now clear that marijuana use during teenage years increases the risk of mental illness later in life. If you smoke pot, you quadruple your chances of developing mental illness later on."

- Dr. John Knight, Children's Hospital Boston



Share new information about marijuana use with your teen.

New information on marijuana use -----



Marijuana use is known to:

- be addictive
- + decrease motivation
- + be a factor in serious car accidents
 - impair short-term memory, perception and motor skills
- + trigger psychotic episodes
- + cause depression and anxiety in regular users
- + increase the risk of schizophrenia, a serious mental illness
- + be associated with the use of hard drugs



If you've used marijuana, don't deny it. If asked you can say:

"It was a mistake and I shouldn't have done it. As my son or daughter you can go out and repeat my mistakes, but my hope is that you don't have to."





- Marijuana: Facts Parents Need to Know, National Institutes of Health NIH publication number 02-4036
- British Medical Journal November, 2002 http://bmj.bmjjournals.com

Myth 7. "If I set limits, my kids won't be popular."



Kids whose parents are involved in their lives are less likely to use alcohol and other drugs.

We want our kids to be popular and to fit in, but keeping kids safe is more important. It's true that many parents don't set limits, but there are many who do. It's not too late to start.

"Teenagers don't want limits but they need them. They don't thrive without limits. It's the job of being a parent. It's one role that is thankless in the short term. The pay off comes much farther down the road."

– Dr. John Knight, Children's Hospital Boston



Get to know your teens' friends and their parents.

How to set limits:

- ▶ Remind your teen that many kids aren't using alcohol or other drugs.
- > State the rules, explain the consequences and follow through.
- Catch your teenager "being good." Reward him for keeping the rules, for achievements and for contributing to the family and the community.
- Keep discussing why alcohol and drugs are not allowed.



How to stand your ground:

Common teen defenses

- "That's not fair. You're the only parent who won't let me..."
- "I didn't know... "
- → "I was holding it for a friend... "
- "It was my first time..."
- "That teacher/person in charge is out to get me..."
- "Don't you trust me? ... "

... and what you can say

- "I am sorry you feel that way but that is the rule in this house."
- "You do now."
- "You're still responsible."
- "Bad things can happen the first time."
- "That is irrelevant."
- "My trust meter is low right now. Here's what you can do to raise it."

"Once he starts driving, always remember you have the ultimate power: the car keys."

- Father of a high school student

"There are some things where there is no discussion. There are houses that Anna can't go to because they are totally unsupervised."

- Mother of a high school sophomore

FOR IDEAS ON HOW TO SET FAMILY LIMITS, see:

- **Parenting Wisely**, an interactive program that may be available through your library or inter-library loan.
- Family Matters, a downloadable step-by-step guide, at www.sph.unc.edu/familymatters

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Heroin Addiction: Can It Happen to Your Kid?



Dealers are targeting youth. Middle and high school youth have been found selling heroin to friends.



Heroin and other opioid use, what to look for:

- Skin—flushed or itchy
- ▶ Eyes—watery or constricted pupils
- Behavior—unusual happiness, slurred speech, staggering walk, confusion, drowsiness
- Overdose—shallow, slow breathing, clammy skin, convulsions and/or coma—call 911/Emergency

"We hear stories such as, 'I went to the local party and did an OC [Oxycontin] and then I went the next weekend and did an OC. And then before I knew I was doing two. And before you know it, an 80 mg is \$80 and I can't afford that. So I switched to heroin which is \$4-\$7 a bag...'"

- Criminal case manager for a juvenile drug court, North Shore

"My son was very sports-oriented. He had done well in school... I assume he started with Klonopin, alcohol and pot. To me, it was devastating even at that level that it was happening. Then he started with cocaine. He woke me up in the middle of the night, he said, 'I gotta get off coke.' He didn't like it. I said, 'It's good you don't like it, get away from it.' And he did. And then he got into heroin."

- Boston Mother of a 19-year-old heroin addict

"They used to be truly good kids, good head on their shoulders. They were lively. They looked healthy, outgoing. They had happy things to talk about. They turned into depressed and complaining people. These girls came from really good backgrounds."

High School senior whose friends are addicted to heroin.
 ("I Got Caught Up In The Moment," Irene Sege. Boston Globe, March 24, 2004)



"They think they wouldn't use heroin. Eventually though, it's a matter of cost. Anyone can get hooked on heroin: 'Johnny in the projects, Johnny at Harvard, and Johnny in the middle.'"

- Outreach Worker, west of Boston



- I Imagined This... But Heroin Lied. Free youth-oriented postcard on the consequences of heroin use. Call 1-800-952-6637 to order.
- Heroin: What's the Real Dope? Summary of facts, consequences and effective prevention approaches. DHHS Publication No. (SMA) 3710C (Fee for video and booklet).

7 Ways to Protect Your Teen from Alcohol and Other Drugs







Be a Role Model

Children imitate adults.

"My parents drank and used drugs in front of us. They told us not to do it, but at the same time, they didn't really care... I'd come home drunk—this is when I was still in high school—and nobody said anything. That's how they grew up. That's how we grew up. I love my mom and dad, but I don't want my kids to have the same childhood memories that I have..."

- Father of teens

To get help dealing with alcohol or if you have other drug questions or problems, call the Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline at 1-800-327-5050, or visit www.helpline-online.com.



How to be a role model:

- ▶ If you drink, do so in moderation.
- Never drive after drinking.
- Do not use illegal drugs.
- ▶ Be conscious of your use of prescription drugs.
- > Flush unused prescription drugs down the toilet.
- Do not ask your teen to bring you alcohol or light cigarettes.
- Use household products in a ventilated area, according to directions.

2

Be Clear About Your Expectations



The most common reason young people give for not using alcohol and drugs is not wanting to harm their relationship with the adults in their lives.

As a parent, you do have an enormous influence over what your teen does. Sometimes parents have a hard time figuring out exactly what to say. Set a clear "no use" policy for your family.



Say: "It is not okay for you to drink, use inhalants or do drugs because..."

- + It is against the law.
- You're still growing and your brain is still developing.
 Alcohol and other substances can cause brain damage that may be permanent.
- If you start when you are young, you are much more likely to become addicted and that will get in the way of your dreams.
- Inhalants are extremely dangerous and can cause permanent brain damage or death, even the first time they are used.



When your kids get older, be more explicit about the dangers of alcohol and other drugs:

- Drinking affects your decision-making. You are more likely to make a bad decision and end up in the wrong place at the wrong time. Being in the wrong place at the wrong time is not necessarily a matter of luck.
- Kids who drink are more likely to drive drunk, or get in a car where the driver is drunk.
- Kids who drink are more likely to try other drugs.
- Using Ecstasy can permanently alter your brain.
- ► Heroin is highly addictive.

"Keep talking about the dangers. Look for stories in the newspaper. If there is an alcohol-related car crash, put it in front of your child and say, 'I hope this never happens to you.' Look for stories on TV, or things that happen to their friends. If your kids are not complaining, 'Oh, not this talk again!' then you're not doing it enough."

- Dr. John Knight, Children's Hospital Boston



Set Limits and Follow Through

FACT:

Parents' permissiveness is a bigger factor in teenage drug use than peer pressure.

"I was wild. I did just about everything a kid shouldn't do—smoked, drank, cut school, was disrespectful... I never got called on any of it until I got arrested, and then it was like, 'Whoa. What do you mean, I'm going to jail?' I finally got the message that for every action there's a reaction. I think a lot of why I was so wild is that I was starved for discipline. I wanted some order in my life—some security. Those were lonely times. I don't want [my son] to ever think I don't care about him or how he acts. That's why I sit down with him and tell him why I have these rules, why I don't want him to do certain things. He knows that if he makes a bad choice he needs to be prepared for the consequences."

- Father of a teenage boy



"How do you hold someone accountable for their actions when mom or dad are covering up for them...? That is the most difficult piece that we have dealt with."

- Criminal case manager for a juvenile drug court

"It doesn't take a genius to figure out that kids who don't have limits are out more. It's not like brain surgery."

- Recent high school graduate



Establish rules.

- Discuss the rules in advance.
- Follow through with consequences. Uphold limits set in school or in the community. For example, if your child is suspended for violating a rule, investigate, and help him learn from the consequences.
- Allow your teen to build trust. Reward good behavior. Tighten the reins when rules are broken.

"When my son and his friends were caught drinking right before April vacation, I cancelled his trip with his team. It wrecked his spring break. It cost a lot of money. But he got the message."

Mother of a high school senior



Be Involved In Your Kid's Life



Teens are much less likely to use drugs when parents are involved in their lives.

"Many parents don't realize the power they have to influence their children."

- Dean of a large high school

"It's amazing what you can learn about what's going on in their lives by listening to them talk to their friends in the car."

- Father of high school students



Ways to stay involved:

- + Listen with empathy. Don't judge.
- + Initiate conversation with an observation like "you seem sad" or "you seem stressed".
- Have dinner together at least 4 times a week.
- + Get to know your teen's friends and their parents.
- When your kids are going to someone's house, check to see if an adult will be home.
- Encourage them to call you if they ever feel at risk.

"We have dinner together four nights a week. Everyone talks about their day—the good things, the bad things. The one rule is you're not allowed to criticize anyone else."

- Mother of high school students

5

Help Your Teen Become Well-Rounded



Teens who participate in community service and extracurricular activities are less likely to be involved in drugs and alcohol.

"It's important for kids to see beyond themselves, to get a sense that they are responsible for helping other people. Whether they're baking pies for the homeless or doing holiday shopping for kids whose mothers have AIDS, it's about teaching them to be responsible and compassionate people."

- Parent of teens in a youth group



Encourage your child to spend several hours a week on a combination of...

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AND

+ Sports

+ Art, music, drama

AND/OR

+ Clubs, etc.



Encourage Your Teen to Try Hard in School

Teens who perform well in school are less likely to become involved with alcohol and drugs.

"We limit all screen time—Internet, TV, video games."

Mother of teens

"My son has a learning disability, so good grades are hard to get, even when he tries. I encourage every improvement, like, 'You went from a C+ to a B- in English. Great!'"

- Mother of high school sophomore
- "...Those that are not interested in school and sports more often turn to alternatives, one being drug use. I hear many people say 'I got injured' or 'I didn't make the sports team' or 'School is boring.' And then they report they were heavily involved in drugs in junior high or high school.
- Clinical Supervisor at a North Shore Treatment Center

"Parents who stay connected to their teens' lives can help them to find ways to do something well, even if they are not A students."

- Former school nurse

Reach Out



Teens with supportive adults in their lives are less likely to use alcohol and other drugs.

Sometimes the job of parenting a teen can be overwhelming. Supportive, caring adults in the community can make a big difference in your teens' development.

"When our family had serious problems, the principal suggested a social worker. I didn't even realize the school had social workers. I never thought we'd need one. They have helped enormously."

- Mother of a family in crisis



Seek and give ongoing support.

- Spend time with close family members.
- ▶ Join activities in your community.
- ► Talk to parents in similar situations.
- Stay connected with neighbors and friends.

People who can help guide you child or help you find community resources:

- + Pediatrician or health care provider
- + Guidance counselor
- Social worker
- Teacher
- + Religious leader



Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline 1-800-327-5050 www.helpline-online.com



• • •	Does your teen
	Have strong family support?
	Understand the limits you have set?
	Have high expectations for his or her future?
	Have a safe environment at home and school?
	Participate in a supportive, caring community?
	Pursue extracurricular activities like sports, art, music, theater, or clubs?
	Learn about values through regular volunteer work, being in a community group and/or religious programs?
	Have dinner with you and your family at least four times a week?
	Hang out with friends who act responsibly?
	Feel he or she can come to you with a serious problem?



Every item on the list contributes to your teen's healthy future and reduces chances of drug and alcohol abuse.

For additional information on prevention:

Don't Give Kids Alcohol and **Choose to Keep Your Freedom**Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse, The Medical Foundation 1-800-952-6637

Inhalants: Parents Packet and **Marijuana: Facts Parents Need to Know** To order these booklets, call 617-624-5140.

I Imagined This... But Heroin Lied

Postcard for youth. Call 1-800-952-6637 to order.

Parents: The Anti-Drug

For information on drugs and advice on how to talk to your kids, visit: www.theantidrug.com.

Keeping Youth Drug Free is a comprehensive booklet from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, DHHS Publication No. (SMA)-3772. **www.health.org/catalog**. Sidebar: Quick Find & Order. Inventory # PHD711

To learn more about new research into the teenage brain: Time Magazine, "Secrets of the Teen Brain," May 10th, 2004. At your library or **www.time.com** (fee may be required)

For help if your child has a problem:

Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline 1-800-327-5050 (24 hours) or **www.helpline-online.com** Information and referrals to prevention and treatment programs.

Children's Hospital Boston. 617-355-ASAP (2727)
For assessment and early intervention services, www.ceasar-boston.org

Additional copies of this booklet can be ordered by calling 1-800-952-6637 or faxing 617-536-8012.

Bureau of Substance Abuse Services, Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Produced by *GEOVISION* www.geovisiononline.com.

Special thanks to Dr. John Knight, Director, Center for Substance Abuse Research at Children's Hospital Boston.

